

# Witness calls Rand 'scuzzball'

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A motorist yesterday identified Andre Rand as the "sleazy scuzzball" she saw walking hand-in-hand with a smiling Down's syndrome girl on the afternoon of July 9, 1987 at Woolley and North Gannon avenues, Willowbrook, about two blocks from the former Staten Island Developmental Center.

Rhonda Romano said the sight of Rand walking with the girl remained etched in her memory because "the two were an odd couple. They should not have been walking together."

Rand, a 43-year-old drifter, is charged with the kidnap-murder of Jennifer Schweiger, a 12-year-old girl with Down's syndrome who disappeared from near her home in Westerleigh on the day that Mrs. Romano said she saw Rand walking with the girl. Rand also was smiling, the witness said.

The girl's body was discovered Aug. 12 in a shallow grave on the grounds of the developmental center, a short distance from where police said Rand maintained a campsite.

Mrs. Romano is the third prosecution witness to testify at a Supreme Court pretrial hearing before Justice Norman J. Felig to determine if they had an independent means on which to base their identification of Rand, other than the procedures used by authorities.

The judge already has ruled that two earlier witnesses would be allowed to testify at Rand's trial, scheduled to begin early next month.

The two, both employees of the developmental center at the time, said they knew Rand from having seen him frequently on the grounds. On July 9 at about 3 p.m., they said they saw him with the Schweiger girl. He also had a bicycle with him.

Mrs. Romano said she saw Rand with a shopping cart or a bicycle. She said she could not be sure. "I know it was something," she said.

On July 9, Mrs. Romano testified she left work in Coney Island, Brooklyn, at 2:30 p.m. to shop at the Staten Island Mall, New Springville.

Rand was "dirty," unshaven and wore slacks, a T-shirt and possibly a windbreaker, she said. The girl wore white shorts with vari-colored stripes. The witness said the girl walked with a limp, "like a woman who had broken her saddle" and was dragging it along.

Mrs. Romano said she had the two under observation for about three minutes as she stopped for a traffic signal at the intersection and they crossed the street in front of her car and then walked on the sidewalk parallel to her auto.

Under cross-examination by Rand's attorney, Jerome V. Giovinnazzo, Mrs. Romano said she had no reason to be suspicious that anything was wrong.

She said she realized the importance of her observations three days later when she read newspaper accounts of the massive search then in progress for the girl. She said she "realized that they were looking in the wrong place."

She said she informed police about what she had seen, but she was not contacted by police until a month later when a detective showed her two photographs of the same man. Although she said the photographs could have been of Rand, she was not positive that the person in the photographs was the defendant and told this to the detective. She said she was never informed of the name of the man in the photographs.

However, she said she was "positive" that the man with the girl had been Rand when she saw him on a TV program following his arrest on Aug. 4 on a kidnapping charge, eight days before the girl's body was discovered by volunteer searchers.

Felig ruled at another pre-trial hearing last week that during the trial, the prosecution may use the testimony of detectives about their questioning of Rand at the time of his arrest in connection with Jennifer's disappearance. While Rand did not make a confession, a detective testified he broke down and cried for an hour when they asked him what he had done to the girl.

Rand had worked at the developmental center as a physical therapy aide from 1966 to 1968.

Assistant District Attorney John Loughrey will present additional witnesses when the identification hearing resumes Tuesday at 2 p.m.